



# Christian Education in the Church: Strategies for Entering the Metaverse Era

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**Abstract.** The development of metaverse technology has influenced various aspects of human life, both in the fields of education, religion, and various other work activities. Activities that were originally face-to-face became virtual media. This certainly opens a lot of people's eyes to feel comfortable with the virtual world. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to explain the description or concept of how Christian education strategies in the church enter the era of metaverse technology. The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative research method with a literature approach. The results of this study are how Christian education strategies in the church enter the metaverse era, including: 1) being creative and innovating in carrying out the great commission, 2) creating a contextual Christian religious education curriculum in the church, 3) strengthening teaching with contextual Christian theology, 4) expanding church services by utilizing the development of metaverse technology, and 5) conducting intense evaluations of each church ministry.

**Keywords:** Christian education, metaverse, technology, church, strategy

## 1 Introduction

The times continue to change, especially in the development of science and technology. Technology is increasingly bringing a significant influence in human life. Example, work that used to be done with human labor can now be done by technological personnel. This means that technology today has a very important role in human life. This makes technology increasingly inseparable in human life, and humans are also increasingly dependent on technology.

At present, the world has almost completely entered the era of metaverse technology. Metaverse is a term first introduced in 1992 by Neal Stephenson. Stephenson says the metaverse is a 3D virtual world that humans can enter [1]. In addition, Facebook also has an idea of the metaverse, which is as a virtual space device where one can browse without space limits by using internet facilities. This means that, the metaverse is a virtual community world that can connect people to be able to work, meet, and play using metaverse technology in smartphone applications and or other devices, without having to meet physically [2].

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Furthermore, the development of metaverse technology allows everyone to be able to do things like working from home, studying from home, schooling from home, going on virtual trips, creating artworks with digital technology and so on. In this case, in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, metaverse technology has become a work system. The existence of smartphone applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and others created a new learning system in the present [3]. Zuckerberg said that in the future there will be more and more metaverse technology present in the surrounding environment to create the ability to teleport from one experience to another. Various technology companies will continue to compete so as to connect their online platforms to each other [2].

The development of metaverse technology has affected various aspects of human life, both in the fields of education, religion, and various other work activities. Activities that were originally face-to-face became virtual media. This certainly opens more and more everyone's eyes to feel comfortable with the virtual world. One of the consequences in Christianity, making the mission and ministry of the church more dependent on digital media [4]. Guichun Jun explained that convergent digital technology continues to develop augmented reality and virtual reality, where many churches have used it to carry out missions and ministries [5].

The emergence of attendance from virtual churches today, has caused an uproar on various social media. It is rumored that the virtual church was the first to be present in the world of the metaverse. The virtual church was pioneered by Pastor DJ Soto in 2016. The idea of creating a church in the metaverse world was later followed by LifeChurch. Pastor DJ Soto considered that the church in the metaverse world could bring people from various places without being limited by distance. Meanwhile, the inaugural service at Life Church, has been attended by 97 people [6]. Thus, the world of the metaverse helps the church in its ministry to make connections with one another.

In addition to having an impact on the church, metaverse technology also has an impact, especially in the world of education. One of the impacts of information technology is that it provides convenience in the management of all academic administration, and the teaching and learning process [7]. Therefore, Bolger said that the metaverse will be an expression of a globalized technological culture. Where metaverse can be understood as a three-dimensional transparent space or sphere that will cover the whole world so that in the future humans will switch between virtual and augmented reality [8].

Indarta and colleagues in their research by using a bibliometric approach to identify patterns of growth knowledge and dissemination of scientific references. As a result of the analysis, it is known that regarding the metaverse and education, this has been increasingly hotly discussed by researchers since the last two years. Where there are 25 national and international scientific articles from the google scholar and scopus databases with in the last five years, namely 2017-2022 [9]. In addition, researchers themselves have also searched and searched about the metaverse, church, and Christian education through google scholar and scopus, researchers see so far still not some are talking about christian education strategies in the church entering the era of metaverse technology.

What is the strategy of Christian Education in the church entering the era of metaverse technology? For this reason, the purpose of this study is to explain the picture or concept of the Christian Education strategy in the church entering the era of metaverse technology. With this research, it is hoped that the church can take appropriate actions and attitudes in accordance with the teachings of the Bible so that it does not take wrong actions in the midst of developments technology is so fast, but technology can help the church to carry out its duties and vocations to experience significant growth in the midst of changing times.

## **2 Methods**

The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative research method with a literature [10]. According to Rukin, qualitative research methods are descriptive research using an understanding development approach, concepts from fact findings to become a scientific theory [10]. While the literature approach is a method of collecting data using literature such as scientific journals, books, and the internet as sources data [11]. This study aims to explain the picture or concept of how Christian education strategies in the church in entering the era of metaverse technology. Thus, researchers collect data and facts through data sources, namely relevant previous research, scientific journals and books and internet media that examine related topics. Then, the author collects the data to be processed through three stages, namely data reduction, classifying, verifying data and data validation to find facts and research results, then described and drawing a conclusion that can be trusted and accountable [12].

## **3 Finding and Discussion**

### **3.1 Arrangements and Opportunities in the Meraverse Era**

Metaverse is one of the interesting issues to be discussed today. Where one of the largest companies in the world, namely Microsoft, is conducting experiments to create an enterprise metaverse. Meanwhile, Facebook also just created a metaverse group in their Reality Labs division. When it secured an investment of 1 billion dollars in April 2021, Epic Games revealed that it would use the funds to create a metaverse. The purpose of the creation of metaverse is to become a modern communication platform to make it easier for everyone to carry out daily activities such as work, play, socialize, and even do virtual concerts [9].

The first major activity that was successfully carried out in the metaverse was a concert conducted by Justin Bieber on November 18, 2021. The concert was conducted in real-time using motion-capture. Justin himself is the one who is whacking his avatar in the metaverse. Concertgoers are also present in real-time so that they can feel the same experience as watching the concert live. Not only that, the audience can respond when watching in the form of emotes that will appear during the concert. Furthermore,

a da some of its other activities that can be done on the metaverse platform, including: First, viewing and buying artworks and clothing. According to Wired, the system of buying and selling artworks in the metaverse can view and buy ownership rights of artworks from companies. In addition, users can also try on clothes directly called digital fashion. Second, play games. In the virtual world of the metaverse, one can enjoy a variety of games such as the oculus rift so that one can enter the virtual world of the metaverse. Third, work. Metaverse is a platform that companies and users can use to work. For example, the current Metaverse can be a new thing for workers who are stuck with the work from home shift system in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Facebook has launched a meeting software for the metaverse called Horizon Workrooms. The tool can be used with VR headsets, AR glasses, and oculus rifts so that workers can feel like in a real office. This will continue to be developed because Meta wants to provide the best user experience for the community and companies. Users will also later have the ability to teleport from one experience to another. Because, new companies will continue to work together and find ways to be able to connect platforms with each other in the metaverse.

The Metaverse is believed to be able to overcome the limitations that exist in the world of education, such as limited class capacity due to the pandemic, limited distance and time to enter the classroom, and so on. With the concept of a virtual world, online learning can be done more interactively without losing the student learning experience. The method of learning anywhere and anytime is an interesting concept that many generation Z like today. Therefore, the Metaverse is predicted to enter many areas of human life in the next 10-15 years.

In the context of Mixed-Reality (MR), the metaverse can bridge social media connectivity. If the interaction can be carried out creatively, this will change many sectors of life, one of which is in the field of education. The new model of distance education supported by the metaverse allows for formal and informal learning experiences with the concept of a 3D virtual campus (online) [13]. Online learning in the metaverse will be able to push the boundaries of social connections and informal learning. Physical presence in the classroom will cease to be a special educational experience. Telepresence, which is the avatar's body language and facial expressions, will allow virtual meetings to be just as effective as in-person meetings. In addition, the metaverse can also allow mixed active pedagogy to foster deeper and more sustainable knowledge [14]. Thus, it allows the whole world to no longer be bound by geographical restrictions.

Based on the description above, regarding the metaverse and its challenges and opportunities, it can be concluded that the implementation of the metaverse in various fields of life is a very large opportunity to support the process of implementing various fields of human activities. For example, in the field of education, audio-visual media has become the most popular application of the metaverse and is widely used in learning. The presence of the metaverse optimizes the various activities carried out so that it becomes more effective. The learning experience gained also with metaverse technology helps students to develop soft-skills and foster better self-perception.

In addition to the advantages and opportunities of metaverse technology, there are also weaknesses and challenges, namely: a metaverse that is borderless or provides unlimited space gives rise to greater engagement. This means that if the world of education

enters the metaverse, it must be ready for wider international engagement. Another challenge is the socioeconomic conditions of society that make not everyone able to gain access to the metaverse. For example, now a days, there are still many online students who complain about the cost of quota and some still don't have their own smartphones/laptops. Furthermore, other challenges are: the crime of the digital world, data security and privacy, the physical condition of shock to metaverse devices such as motion sickness, nausea, and dizziness [9]. There are also more and more crimes on social media such as non-verbal sexual harassment, fraud, cyber bullying, hecker, plagiarism, hoaxes and other crimes [15]. In addition, more and more people are ultimately indifferent to their religion, especially the Christian congregations both in European countries [16] and especially in Indonesia itself [17]. Therefore, the church needs to take a stand to devise the right strategy in carrying out its vocation. With a church that is responsive in facing the challenges and changes of the times, it will make the church grow and develop and become a healthy church, as its duty and vocation in the midst of this world.

### 3.2 The Church's Response to the Development of Science and Technology

The development of Science and Technology is the result of discoveries and research. The development begins with a huge sense of human curiosity. This curiosity encourages humans to try to answer the natural realities that exist in the world through various ways, and this encourages the development of science and technology. In line with the origin of the word Science which comes from the Latin "*scieantia*" which means knowledge or knowing. Science aims to produce something that is used for real life and meets human needs. More simply, science is knowledge gained from the learning and proof process. Therefore, world continues to experience continuous development of science and technology.

In the Bible, the implementation of science and technology has actually existed since the first man was created. Science and technology come from God developed through man. The influence of the birth of science and technology is a reflection of the attitude of believers (Christians) who are responsible for the God-given tasks as written in Genesis 1:28, which verse underlies the birth of science and technology development. God's mandate, which explains man must be fruitful and multiply, has power over the fishes, birds, and all animals, builds man's thinking to find a way to master what God wills.

The book of Proverbs 1:5 explain, every believer must be wise in listening and then become a person who likes to add knowledge. God wants all work to be done very well, for it is God who gives knowledge and expertise to man (Exodus 35:31). As a partner of God, man is given the ability to know, but still submit to the authority of God the Creator (Proverbs 1:7). The Christian faith provides the basis for believers to accept the development of science and technology that exists in the Christian faith [19]. Einstein said "*science without religion is blind and religion without science is lame*". Therefore, science and religion are an inseparable whole.

Furthermore, the church has a calling known as the three-tasking of the church. Therefore, a healthy church is a church that is able to maintain and carry out its three-

duties even though it is faced with challenges from the development of science and technology. As for the three-task of the church, it is: *First, Marturia* (witness) is a testimony that a person has experienced through the work of Jesus Christ for himself and the world. *Second, Koinonia* (communion) is a picture of communion between believers and Jesus Christ. *Third, Diakonia* (ministry) is commonly used by church social activities to help congregations or people in need [18]. Thus, the church has three main callings that must make a change for the world so that it needs to be carried out simultaneously so as to create order in glorifying God [19]. This needs to be implemented until the end of time, especially in the 21st century, which has entered the era of metaverse technology.

The 21st century is also called the era of the industrial revolution 4.0 because there have been various forms of paradigmatic changes. There are six things, namely: *First*, the digital revolution is developing very rapidly so that it has an impact on changes in civilization, culture, and education. *Second*, globalization, internationalization, and multilateral relations further strengthen integration between parts of the world. *Third*, globalization, corporations cause the occurrence of world leveling where there is almost no free space from regional and international environmental influences. *Fourth*, the rapid changes in the world have resulted in a very rapid process of obstruction. *Fifth*, the emergence of new communities such as the *knowledge society*, information society, networking society. *Sixth*, the emergence of demands for creativity and innovation as individual capital in the face of competition [20]. So, the church is currently living in the midst of shifts in values and lifestyles that occur along with changes and technological developments. Change feels fast and massive, so what has been trending in the present time, can quickly pass. Technology is changing from time to time, to a very different point from what previous generation has experienced before. Advances in technology have indulged in human life, including spiritual needs.

Based on the description above, the church must be present to provide education in terms of literacy and or an activity to support the spiritual growth of each congregations [21]. Therefore, the church needs to have skills in the field of literacy and digitalization in empowering congregations. Empowerment will be easy to do when the church first has these abilities and gifts. In principle, the church cannot develop without an agreed and implemented mission activity. Mission activities must be understood as a divine project that begins with God as the sender and owner of the project, so that dependence on the divine being, that is, the Holy Spirit becomes a dead price that must be taught and emphasized to the congregation in developing God's church [22]. Thus, the church in conveying its mission must have a precise / effective strategy in facing challenges and opportunities, especially in the era of the metaverse. The challenges of each age are always different, both in principle and in form. Therefore, the church actually needs to be an opportunity to bring up new innovations in developing ministry.

### 3.3 Christian Education Strategy in the Church

The main purpose of religious education is to shape a person to have a religious attitude, have an independent personality, be strong, stable, and be a learner throughout his life. Christian education is a political activity and a natural *supra* activity because it

involves god's activity in all educational processes [21]. Therefore, what distinguishes Christian education from other types of education is that a person will be brought to the values of holiness in Christ. This is in line with Groome's opinion that Christian education aims to advance political spirituality, which is an education that intervenes in and influences the social life of people with Christian values [23]. Similarly, Seymour explained, Christian education aims to guide a person to know, understand, and obey the commandments of God's Word in daily life [24]. So, it can be concluded that the learning of Christian education serves as a means that trains a person to be able to live according to the norms of the family, church, school, and society that are not contrary to the will of God's Word.

The process of learning activities for Christian education must be carried out on an ongoing basis. This means that Christian education must be able to educate and enable a person to face various challenges and threats, especially in the era of the metaverse [23]. Therefore, Christian education must be a teaching based on the teachings of Christ, the teachings of the prophets and the apostles. All Christian education providers must perform teaching duties according to the mandate of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). This is because the church is responsible for maintaining the identity and function of Christian education in pastoring the churches of God.

The Church in carrying out the great commission needs to be always *updated* in the development of its vocation so that it continues to develop and can follow the pattern of spiritual life of the congregation in accordance with the changing times. The needs of the church, which are increasingly closely related to the all-digital lifestyle, require people who can serve God and have the ability to actualize themselves through the times. For this reason, the strategy in entering the era of metaverse technology intends to make a plan both in the short and long term that is structured to achieve a certain goal. For this reason, a strategy of Christian education in the church entered the era of the metaverse that researchers formulated, including:

*First*, be creative and innovate in carrying out the great mandate. With the current technology, the church is required to be able to find new innovations that can improve and develop its vocation tasks. One of the innovations that the church can provide is through ministry reaching souls. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many churches have carried out worship services using virtual media such as the Zoom meeting application. Therefore, in reaching out to the souls of today's children, especially generations Z and Alpha who will become more familiar with the virtual world, the church needs to make a creative strategy and innovating in reaching the souls of these children, one of which is by utilizing the space facilities of the metaverse technology used by these children.

*Second*, create a contextual church Christian education curriculum. Changes in the times are inevitable and will change faster in the future, especially in the world of metaverse technology that will enter various fields of human life. The existences of this, of course, will have an impact on reducing employment due to being replaced with technological power. Therefore, the church needs to create and compile a contextual curriculum that suits the needs of each congregation. The church needs to think about how to keep the congregation growing into a congregation that has the integrity of faith and character and has abilities that can be implemented in everyday life, so that the congregation grows both physically and spiritually. Therefore, the church needs to

create and compile a contextual curriculum in each of its programs from short-term to long-term programs. In fact, when necessary congregations are given space to be involved in the preparation of curricula involving their views in the current era of the metaverse to suit their needs. In this way, the congregation will be better prepared to live globally.

*Third*, strengthen teaching with contextual Christian theology, which is a theology that can answer the needs and struggles of the congregation in the era of metaverse technology. For example, matters concerning religion, ideology, culture, social networks, technology, *relationships*, work, career, family and marriage, ethics and morals in cross-border and cross-border contexts. Thus, they experience a growth in consciousness and the ability to perform their roles meaningfully within a highly compound and complex world. Therefore, Christian education needs to be carried out in an integrated and sustainable manner from early childhood education. That is, educational programs at a certain age level must be designed in relation to the interests and contributions that the next age level will receive. A resilient congregation will be formed if education at an early age, children, and youth goes well. This is in accordance with the exhortation in Proverbs 22:6, "*Educate a young man according to the way he should go, and even in his old age he will not deviate from that path.*" Therefore, Christian education providers in all categories should plan education and teaching by basing it on a clear vision, mission, goals, and objectives in accordance with contextual Christian theology. Thus, the church needs to prepare its teachers to be competent and professional. Church needs to train his teachers how to achieve the vision and mission of the church, so that it is carried out optimally. In addition, the educator and ministry in the church must be someone who is sensitive to the needs of the congregation so as to assist the congregation in strengthening their identity.

*Fourth*, expand the ministry of the church by utilizing the development of metaverse technology. In today's digital era, it is getting closer to metaverse technology (virtual world), the church has a very wide opportunity and opportunity to develop and improve the quality of its ministry. The church can utilize metaverse technology wisely and precisely so that metaverse technology can be a solution or key answer to every problem and challenge faced by the church today. For example, in the previous Covid-19 pandemic situation that has hit many countries, with advances in technology and information, worship activities in churches can still run with the help of virtual media such as zoom meeting applications, google classroom, Microsoft teams, and others. Therefore, in the face of the upcoming metaverse era, the church needs to take advantage of the advancement of metaverse technology for the advancement and growth of the ministry so as not to lag behind. For example, churches can create learning media by utilizing various types of technology as media and teaching materials given to congregations.

*Fifth*, conduct an intense evaluation of each church ministry. Christian education must always be consistent in conducting evaluations. Because this is one of the main keys to success in the implementation of Christian education in the church in the era of the metaverse. The results of the evaluation will be a measure to assess the success and at the same time the basis used to make improvements and development of the church ministry in the future. Church institutions need to move quickly to keep up with changes



in terms of approaches, models, and methods of educational evaluation in the metaverse society. In general, the benefits of evaluation activities include: 1) in order to understand the participation of education, facilities, infrastructure, and existing situations/conditions, 2) to make decisions in determining the next program, and 3) to improve the quality of the learning process to be more qualified. Therefore, the evaluation stage is one of the most important stages in church management. Because with the evaluation stage, educators can improve themselves so that in the future they will be even better. There are several aspects that need to be evaluated in activities in the church, including: 1) the purpose of each ministry program, 2) the entire program, 3) the ministers such as teachers or servants of God, 4) facilities that support the ministry process in the church, 5) church data to keep it *up* to date, 6) curriculum designed, 7) the congregations served and this is the main purpose of the evaluation activity.

## 4 Conclusion

The Church in carrying out the great commission needs to be always *updated* in the development of its vocation so that it continues to develop and can follow the pattern of spiritual life of the congregation in accordance with the changing times. For this reason, a strategy of Christian education in the church towards the era of metaverse technology that researchers formulate, among others: *First*, the church needs to be creative and innovate in carrying out the great mandate so that the church needs to find innovations a new one that can improve and develop its vocation tasks, particularly in reaching out to the souls of children born to generation z and alpha who are increasingly familiar with the virtual world. *Second*, the church needs to create a contextual church Christian education curriculum in each of its programs from short-term to long-term programs. The church also needs to give the congregation space to be involved in the preparation of a curriculum that involves their views in the current era of the metaverse to fit the needs. In this way, the congregation will be better prepared to live globally. *Third*, strengthen teaching with contextual Christian theology, which is a theology that can answer the needs and struggles of the congregation in the era of metaverse technology. *Fourth*, expand the ministry of the church by utilizing the development of metaverse technology. The church can utilize metaverse technology wisely and precisely so that metaverse technology can be a solution or key answer to every problem and challenge faced by the church today. *Fifth*, the church needs to conduct an intense evaluation of each church ministry. The results of the evaluation will be a measure to assess the success and at the same time the basis used to make improvements and development of the church ministry in the future.

**Research Contribution:** The results of this research are expected to contribute ideas for teachers in the church to improve how Christian education strategies in the church enter the metaverse era so that church services carried out can have an impact in accordance with the needs of the congregation and changing times.

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